

# EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



*EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIP1 to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.*

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## Youth Participation in Development Projects

Too often, young people are portrayed in negative ways - as gang members, juvenile delinquents, or reckless troublemakers seeking to inflict damage on "adult" society. As persuasive as these views of youth may appear, they are frequently very far removed from the truth: the majority of the world's youth are often more interested in leading productive and meaningful lives rather than in harming or undermining their communities. In various regions and varying situations around the world, hundreds of thousands of young people are spearheading positive social change - leading community initiatives, operating small businesses, and reshaping political processes.

More can be done to nurture these productive behaviors, as young people constitute clear assets to development when they are positively empowered to be active citizens. Supporting and including young people in development processes is critical for several reasons. Firstly, and fundamentally, youth have experience, knowledge and ideas that are unique to their situation, enabling them to offer key insights and perspectives on development that adults cannot. Secondly, in many communities, youth make up the majority of the local population; as a result, youth voices can be crucial expressions of overall community needs. Finally, regardless of their current status, young people are the future custodians of their environments and future leaders of their peers. The lessons learned today influence tomorrow, and already the majority of youth around the world counter real world issues of childbirth, disease and unemployment. Although "youth" by definition, they are wise to the roles government and economics play in their life and community. It is therefore imperative that young people are given opportunities to develop the values, attitudes and skills they need to actively participate and succeed in the spheres of family, workplace and community both today and tomorrow. A failure to promote youth development - and roles for youth in development - will have disastrous effects on countries across the world, both in the short- and long-term.

Youth participation is a way to provide opportunities for youth to take on greater responsibilities and, through these real world experiences, to build competencies and develop into successful adults. Participation in social groups fosters a feeling of connectedness and belonging, helping young people to develop a sense of identity. The experience of contributing to a cause, a decision, and/or a group can be crucial part to the development of sense of responsibility, purpose and self-worth. Creativity and innovation are stimulated by challenging youth to take on clear tasks and then providing the coaching needed along the way as obstacles or unexpected results are encountered.

Promoting youth participation can take many forms, from encouraging youth volunteering in community development projects, to empowering young people to offer their perspectives on world issues, to having youth serve as members of advisory boards, become peer mentors, and lead development programs, non-profit organizations and small businesses. However, what is most important is that in all these cases, attention is paid to the quality of this participation - to ensure that young people are not just token figures, but that they are meaningfully engaged in ways that strengthen their problem-solving, decision-making and leadership skills. This prepares and engages young people today to actively build a both a better future and a better present. It also illustrates one of the most effective forms of sustainable development- achieved only when the processes cultivated today last for generations to come.

For more information, contact Melanie Beauvy, Associate Director for Youth Involvement, EQUIP3/Youth Trust, Education Development Center, [mbeauvy@edc.org](mailto:mbeauvy@edc.org).

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### Youth participation

*encourages involvement,*

*builds competencies, fosters*

*development, and promotes a*

*sense of belonging.*

## Youth Participation in Rapid Appraisal Missions

At the conclusion of a recent NGO-sponsored project for girls who had been demobilized from Lord Resistance Army (LRA) units in Northern Uganda, young participants were asked to speak about the impact of the project on their lives. After hearing her peers speak about the many benefits of the psycho-social counseling services and healthcare interventions that had been offered, one young woman alerted researchers to what she saw to be a critical gap in project planning and design.

She observed that no one had ever asked her and her peers what they had learned during their time with the LRA - what kinds of practical life skills they had developed that might benefit them in the future. She reported that these assets were seemingly never taken into consideration during the design of the de-mobilization program that had been put together for her and her peers. She spoke about having learned to organize meals for large groups of child and adult soldiers, and about having been forced by circumstances to develop leadership and problem-solving skills. She told researchers that none of these skills or strengths were ever acknowledged during the project, which tended to treat her and her peers as passive victims rather than active survivors, and did little to build sustainable livelihood strategies for them that drew on their hard-won resilience and practical life experiences.

*“...importance of engaging young people as key informants in the design and development of new programs intended to benefit them.”*

This anecdote underscores the importance of engaging young people as key informants in the design and development of new programs intended to benefit them. It also highlights why it is not enough simply to have young people serve as respondents to questionnaires or focus group sessions developed by adult researchers, but instead to be involved as full stakeholders both in the development of research tools and in their application. All too often, adult researchers may simply ask the wrong questions or miss key information sources unless they draw young people into the design, application and analysis phases of research protocols. It is also of critical importance to “workshop” emerging research findings with additional groups of youth – testing analytical “scenarios” in a dynamic and interactive way with young respondents to ensure that they concur with overall results and to allow them to shed further light on emerging themes and common findings.

Based on its wide ranging experience in involving youth in rapid appraisal, focus group research, and community mapping exercises worldwide, EQUIP3 is currently developing a set of guidelines for effective participation by young people in what is called Youth-Driven Appraisal and Planning (YDAP) activities. The guidelines, available in early 2006, will speak to the capacity-building needs for both youth and adult researchers in a YDAP activity, and to effective practices for full youth participation across all the critical phases of appraisal and planning initiatives.

For more information about Rapid Appraisal Missions, contact EQUIP3 / Youth Trust CTO, Clare Ignatowski, at [cignatowski@usaid.gov](mailto:cignatowski@usaid.gov).

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## Ruwaad: Palestinian Youth Empowerment Project

It is not often that when a USAID Mission Director visits the launch event for a new project, he spends all of his time speaking in a “fish-bowl” session with a group of 16-24 year old youth – answering their questions, seeking their advice and listening to their concerns. But that is just what happened when Jim Bever, USAID West Bank/Gaza Mission Director joined the November 15-16 launch event for the “Ruwwad” Palestinian Youth Empowerment Project. This session was just one of the ways young people participated in the two-day event; they also took the lead in designing, facilitating, reporting, and evaluating sessions.

One 16 year-old from Ramallah summarized her experience of the launch event by saying, “I am still amazed by the fact that young people were invited to participate in all of the planning and partnership development activities these past two days. This is the first time I know of that the launch of a new program intended to benefit youth actually had youth fully involved and always present. It is a good sign for the future success of this project.”

Youth participation in the November 15-16 Ruwwad launch event builds on a long standing commitment to involving youth at every stage of program design, implementation and evaluation. This began with extensive youth involvement in the Rapid Appraisal and Planning Mission that informed the overall programming priorities and approaches of the five-year activity.

This commitment to youth participation is also reflected in the establishment of the Ruwwad Youth Forum, an advisory body that will serve as a critical resource and sounding board for Chief of Party, Hisham Jabi, and all of the lead implementing partners who will drive the delivery of Ruwwad’s programming.

Another area of youth involvement can be seen in the design of the project’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan, which builds in a role for youth to contribute to all of Ruwwad’s M&E activities. As one 22 year-old Youth Forum member from Ramallah said, “Youth involvement in monitoring and evaluation is critical to the success of Ruwwad. Who better will understand the impacts of this project on young people, and who will be more interested in addressing any obstacles that might be encountered, than youth themselves? Having us participate in monitoring and evaluation is not just a good idea, it is an essential ingredient for success.”

The Ruwwad project team understands that meaningful youth participation will require ongoing capacity building for all of the youth and adults involved. Additionally, evaluation of the Rapid Appraisal and Planning Mission and launch events have indicated areas in which both youth and adults could improve the ways that they contribute to the dynamic new youth-adult partnership that will form the foundation of this pioneering activity.

Ruwwad is a five-year project funded by USAID/West Bank Gaza and implemented by EQUIP3 / Youth Trust. Ruwwad’s projected results are the development of 5,000 Palestinian male and female youth leaders at local and national levels and the creation of sustainable environments for 100,000 Palestinian male and female youth to engage in positive educational, economic, social and civic activities.

For more information, please contact Ruwwad CTO, Fadi Khoury, at [fkhoury@usaid.gov](mailto:fkhoury@usaid.gov).



Palestinian youth participating in a focus group

## ERfKE: Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (Jordan)

Jordan’s Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) is using Community YouthMapping to meaningfully engage young people in achieving its goals. The ERfKE Support Program (ESP), funded by USAID/Jordan as part of EQUIP2, promotes the Ministry of Education’s capacity to develop a high quality education system that serves as an engine of economic growth in the region while positioning Jordan as a hub for ICT.

Community YouthMapping (CYM) is a strategy of the Academy for Educational Development’s Center for Youth Development and Policy Research. Through this project, youth and adults canvass communities to uncover places to go, things to do, opportunities, and issues relevant to youth and community development. Youth are trained to use protocols and collect data using quantitative and qualitative tools. By training youth to directly collect information in and about their communities, CYM provides young people with transferable skills and builds their confidence. Importantly, CYM demonstrates how youth can play a leadership role in their community’s educational development.

*“Importantly, [Community Youth Mapping] demonstrates how youth can play a leadership role in their community’s educational development.”*

In Jordan, the CYM process will be implemented as part of ESP's School to Career (STC) component. STC is an approach that promotes and develops employability skills and professional competencies of students in grades 9 to 11, in preparation for the challenges and opportunities of the knowledge economy. STC partnerships link the public, private and NGO sectors to collaboratively integrate academic and applied education. CYM will serve as a model for future STC programs in the participating schools.

In an effort to identify and develop STC opportunities, over 120 young people from five regions in Jordan (Amman, Aqaba, Karak, Irbid and Petra) will be trained to collect relevant data from local businesses, NGOs and others. This information will be managed and analyzed by youth with adult leaders to improve the connections among youth, schools, NGOs and local businesses. In collaboration with the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center, the youth will be trained in February 2006 and spend the next several weeks collecting and analyzing data. As true partners in the educational reform process, the youth will help local working groups develop strategies and action plans based on their findings to improve and increase STC opportunities.

For more information, please contact the ERIKE CTO, Maha Al-Shaer at [mal-shaer@usaid.gov](mailto:mal-shaer@usaid.gov) or visit the project's website at <http://www.esp-jordan.org>.

## YouthNet: Participatory Learning and Action

YouthNet adapted the community-based assessment process of participatory learning and action (PLA), emphasizing a youth-centered approach in Ethiopia, Namibia, and Tanzania. Each of the three projects used a series of tools and exercises that help young people talk about themselves, their bodies, their neighborhoods, their families, and their perceptions of risks for pregnancy and HIV infection.

In Ethiopia, 51 youth leaders were trained in the use of participatory methods and PLA tools, including body mapping, social mapping, and problem ranking. In social mapping, participants draw a simple map indicating the boundaries of their community, the social infrastructure, and housing patterns. In body mapping, workshop participants draw images of the female and male bodies, including details of the reproductive system and how it functions. These activities help participants discuss sensitive issues. The trained youth leaders worked with more than 800 other young people, conducting participatory assessments among youth and adult stakeholders in both rural and urban settings in every region of the country. The youth analyzed the data from these assessments, synthesized the information, and led regional and national dissemination workshops to share and validate the findings. The youth leaders also created a National Youth Charter and a three-year Plan of Action that was presented to the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture at a national youth event. The documents called for the Ethiopian government to create a sustainable environment for improved youth sexual and reproductive health.

In Namibia, 59 youth leaders selected from faith-based organizations and youth centers participated in a training workshop, where they learned PLA techniques, communications skills for reproductive health and HIV issues, information analysis, and presentation skills. These youth leaders led 28 assessments involving more than 600 youth ages eight to 16 and facilitated group discussions with 84 adults. The youth then compiled and analyzed the data and presented recommendations to community members and faith leaders. As a result, a working group developed a Christian family life education curriculum. Thirty church leaders have participated in a master training-of-trainers workshop and are scheduled to train 90 additional church leaders in using the curriculum. With the curriculum, these faith leaders will reach 3,000 youth ages eight to 16.

The PLA project in Tanzania emphasized youth-adult partnerships in working with religious groups. A total of 48 youth leaders and adults from Muslim and Christian groups in the Iringa Region used PLA techniques to assess their peers' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to reproductive health and HIV, as well as youth access to these services in rural Tanzania. A total of 1,115 youth and adults participated in the assessments. The project led to the expansion or initiation of work by faith groups on issues identified during the assessments, with YouthNet providing workshops to build capacity among the groups to design and implement youth projects.

In Namibia, young people and adults worked together to create a Christian family life education curriculum.



Photo: YouthNet

*YouthNet is a global program to improve reproductive health and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among people 10 to 24 years old coordinated by Family Health International. For more information, please contact Pamela Mandel at [pmandel@usaid.gov](mailto:pmandel@usaid.gov) or visit [www.fhi.org/youthnet](http://www.fhi.org/youthnet).*